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# First record of Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* for Cameroon and western Africa

Ronald Messemaker

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Première mention du Vanneau sociable *Vanellus gregarius* pour le Cameroun et l'Afrique de l'Ouest. Un Vanneau sociable *Vanellus gregarius* a été observé et photographié dans la plaine inondable du Logone, Cameroun du Nord, le 31 janvier 2001. Ceci constitue la première mention pour le pays et l'Afrique de l'Ouest de ce migrateur paléarctique menacé, qui niche en Russie et au Kazakhstan et hiverne, en Afrique, principalement en Eritrée et, au moins précédemment, au Soudan.

On 31 January 2001, during a waterbird survey of the Logone floodplains in northern Cameroon and Chad by the Foundation Working Group International Waterbird and Wetland Research, The Netherlands (WIWO), in collaboration with the Waza Logone Project, Cameroon, I observed a lapwing with a conspicuous head pattern, near Iyve (11°25'N 15°03'E). I immediately identified it as a Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* in non-breeding plumage, having observed the species on several previous occasions in The Netherlands and Israel. The bird was feeding at a distance of 30 m in a partially dry arm of the Logone River. I watched it for c30 minutes with 10 x 40 binoculars and took photographs. Reference to Hayman *et al*<sup>6</sup> revealed nothing concerning the species' occurrence in Cameroon. Subsequently, when Borrow & Demey<sup>4</sup> was published, I found that Sociable Lapwing was not mentioned, confirming my suspicion that the species was new to Western Africa.

## Description

Slightly larger and more slender necked than Spur-winged Lapwing *Vanellus spinosus*, which was common in the area. Conspicuous white supercilium from bill to well behind eye, bordered by long black eyestripe. Crown greyish brown. Throat dirty white; head-sides washed yellowish. Upperparts greyish brown with contrasting black primaries. Pale line of secondaries visible at rest. Breast pale greyish brown. Belly whitish. Bill slender, black. Legs blackish. Upright stance. Foraging behaviour typical of plovers, with short, swift runs interrupted by abrupt stops followed by pecking. Plain upperparts and breast, and contrasting head pattern, are indicative of a non-breeding-plumaged adult (see Fig 1).

This is the first record for Cameroon and Western Africa of this threatened Palearctic migrant, which is classified as Vulnerable<sup>3</sup>. It breeds in Russia and Kazakhstan and is rapidly declining, with a population estimated at 2,500–10,000 individuals<sup>3,7</sup>. In Africa, it winters mainly in Eritrea and, at least formerly, in Sudan<sup>7,16</sup>. In Eritrea, the species has been reported to winter in variable numbers, usually in flocks of 10–20, once c150 (earliest date 28 November, latest 10 March; absent in some years)<sup>13</sup>, but there is only one recent record, by D Zinner<sup>1</sup>. There are also four old records from within the borders of present-day Ethiopia, all in the period 1925–1941, but none since<sup>1</sup>. In Sudan it was formerly scarce in the north of the country and is now considered rare, with no reports since 1950<sup>10,11</sup>. Sociable Lapwing is a rare passage visitor through Egypt, from early September to mid-November and from late February to mid-April, occasionally in winter, but again there are relatively few recent records<sup>5</sup>. There is a single old record from north-east Somalia (Shiikh) of an immature male on 2 November 1919<sup>2</sup>. Vagrants have been recorded in Morocco (Tangier Peninsula, 3 December 1972)<sup>14</sup>, the Canaries (El Hierro, 10–12 February 1992)<sup>8</sup> and Seychelles (Alphonse, 12 November 2001–15 March 2002)<sup>12</sup>.

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Figure 1. Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius*, Logone floodplains, near Iyve, Cameroon, 31 January 2001 (Ronald Messemaker)

Vanneau sociable *Vanellus gregarius*, plaines inondables de la Logone, près d'Iyve, Cameroun, 31 janvier 2001 (Ronald Messemaker)

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Wethouder Vosstraat 58, 7946 AX Wanneperveen. E-mail: R.Messemaker@Natuurmonumenten.nl.